Mildred Van Blockland

Family Coming to Union County

I: What is your full name and when were you born?

MV: My name is Mildred Catherine Spencer Van Blockland and I was born April 5, 1909.

I: How long has your family been in this valley?

MV: My grandparents came in 1862; they came by a wagon train pulled by oxen.

I: How many were in the family at that time?

MV: There were just three, my grandmother, grandfather and their small son. They were my mother's family.

I: What was their name?

MV: George and Catherine Gekeler.

I: Do you remember hearing what their impressions were when they first got to the valley?

MV: I remember them saying the valley was covered with tall grass as far as the eye could see. I think they came in September. They didn't really plan to stop here; they intended to go on to the Willamette Valley, but they were out of food, so they stopped here for the winter.

I: Was there a town here at that time?

MV: No, I don't think there was a real town, but there were some settlers living up in what they call Old Town.

I: Where did your folks settle?

MV: Where Gekeler Lane is now.

I: Gekeler Lane goes on across the Highway 30 for quite a while, do you think they had all of that area?

MV: I think so. Probably that winter they lived in a make-shift tent. But in the spring they built a cabin somewhere along there.

I: Tell me a little about your house.

MV: The house was small; there were just two bedrooms for all of us, and us kids were in one bedroom with two big double beds.

The funny thing, when I was eight years old I knew nothing of where babies came from, not like nowadays, when every eight year old knows everything.

Bob was born in that house in one bedroom and us kids were in the other room. It was night and I heard a lot of noises; Mother was a-groaning and screaming. Gosh, I was scared! I thought, "My gosh." I put my head under the covers. Pretty soon Dad came in - maybe I was yelling or something, I don't know why he came in –he said, "You go back to sleep. Everything is alright." I tried and I guess it must've quieted down. In the morning I found out when the Doctor came, that Bob had been born. Of course my parents told us kids that the doctor had come with a little black bag that had the baby inside. Wasn't that the dumbest thing? I can't understand why people back then told such lies.

I: Why didn't your mother go to the hospital?

MV: I think there was a hospital, but I don't know why mother chose to have the baby at home, maybe it cost too much. Home birthing was pretty common in those days.

I: Did you have chores on the farm?

MV: We didn't have a farm when we first got up there; it was just a place to live. Grandma had given my parents an acre or so near the old Gekeler place to build a house on, because we were just running her crazy when we were at her house. My dad was a carpenter by trade and he built the house. He put in a garden and some small apple trees. I think he also had a cow or two for milk and some chickens. He built the barn in 1926 but before then, there wasn't much there. The farm was very slow to start; he didn't have any money, and there was no steady work. We were really poor.

I: What did the Gekelers do for a living?

MV: They farmed wheat and cereal grains.

Dad's Music

I: Your dad and his brother played at dances?

MV: Yes, my dad loved the violin!

I: Did his parents play?

MV: Not that I know of. Of course, I didn't know his dad he had died. I don't know where they got the talent. He had five brothers and they all played – the banjo, mandolin and other instruments.

I: Where did they play?

MV: Oh, just around at different homes for people; people used to have dances in their homes.

I: Would any organizations have dances too?

MV: They probably did, but I didn't know about them. I think you'd call us backwoodsey; they just played old-timey music.

I: Did your father play music all those years, or did he just do if for a while?

MV: There was some plan, I think. Some of them got married and moved away. He still played, but it is hard to remember, I was just in grade school then.

I: What did they call themselves?

MV: They called themselves the Spencer Boys.

I: I wonder if they were any pictures of them.

MV: I don't know. There may have been some.

I: Now in those hard winters what did you do, for instance, in the evenings?

MV: I read a lot, but we didn't have electricity, just oil lamps. I don't know when electricity came in. We went to bed early.

Going to School

I: Tell me about where you went to school.

MV: I went to the Liberty School.

I: Where was that?

MV: It was out by Blue Mountain Grange at McAlister and Gekeler.

I: How many rooms were there?

MV: It was just one room with all eight grades in that one room.

I: When did they start school?

MV: They started in September and we went to school the whole year like nowadays. I think we started at the eight o'clock. Most kids walked to school and some rode their horses; we walked to school. There was a hitching post that you could tie up your horse.

I: What happened in the wintertime when you had heavy snow?

MV: We walked over the snowdrifts. If there was a blizzard during the day or if it was bad sometimes, they let school out early so we could get home before dark.

I: Did they have special ceremonies for moving from one grade to the next?

MV: I don't remember of any. Of course at the eighth grade we had to take a state exam to see if we learned enough, to go into high school.

I: Were there report cards?

MV: Oh yes, they had report cards. In that book I gave you, my eighth grade report card was in there; I saved it. I totally forgot what it was, but it's in that memory book. I think that grades were similar to those they give today.

I: Now if there was only one teacher for eight grades and she was working with one group, what were the other kids doing?

MV: Studying usually. I think most of them were writing or she would give things for them to read. We had library books. I don't know where they came from, but we did have reading exercises.

I: Did you have writing tablets and pencils or did you have slates?

MV: I think some children had slates, but most of the time it was paper and pencil. When I first started school I think there were slates.

I: How did they sharpen the writing implements? What were they made of?

MV: I don't know what they were made of, but they were a gray kind of gritty thing.

I: How did you clean the slate?

MV: I don't remember that. I think we just probably had rags; there were no paper towels like we have now.

I: Did they have blackboards?

MV: Oh yes, blackboards and chalk up in the front of the classroom. She would write instructions down on the blackboard.

I: Did you have a recess time in the morning and afternoon or just at lunch?

MV: Yes, we had recesses and we'd go out and play Tag or Hide and Seek -- old-fashioned games. We had swings, and the boys would play baseball and games like that.

I: Were they restrooms inside the school?

MV: Oh no, just old outhouses, they had one for the boys and one for the girls..

I: What was your favorite subject?

MV: Probably reading. We had reading, arithmetic, and handwriting. These were taught through the first 8 grades.

I: Did you have a special book that you looked at, or was it just the stuff from off the blackboard?

MV: I think we had special books; I remember the illustrations in some of the books.

I: Did you have anything like arts and crafts or did you do plays, recitations, and memorize poems?

MV: Oh we memorized poems. We'd have a special Christmas program; it wasn't very elaborate. It would consist of a pageant or something like that.

We had an old organ that somebody would play maybe, but I don't really remember. Usually our parents came and other members of the community; we would sing songs together.

I: What did the kids wear?

MV: They wore anything they had. They would have to change after school so they wouldn't mess up their school clothes.

I: How many outfits would a girl have?

MV: Oh, I don't know. I don't think they had as many different outfits as they do nowadays.

I: Were any of them store-bought?

MV: Shoes were store bought. The boys probably had store bought clothes as well, but the girls wore homemade dresses. Of course they didn't wear jeans very much. We had long stockings and they were very warm. Oh, it was awful! We had garters that would hold up the stockings, those old, black, cotton stockings.

I: How far did they go up, past your knees?

MV: Just up above the knee and the garter would fasten on. Girls didn't wear short dresses.

I: When it was really bad weather outside, what did you do at recess or lunch time when you couldn't go out?

MV: We'd probably draw or color.

I: Did you ever do any round dancing or anything like that?

MV: No, there wasn't any room for that.

I: Tell me about the kind of heat you had.

MV: There was an old woodstove that was pretty nice, especially when it was cold and we'd walk to school and be very glad for the heat. There was a little room you came into, like a mudroom, with hooks; everybody hung their clothes up and took their galoshes or rubbers off there.

I: Did you have little desks, or little tables and chairs?

MV: Desks.

I: Tell me about the teacher. Were they usually single women?

MV: I don't think all of them were actually single. There was one who was real young and this was probably her first school. The eighth grade boys were not that young, so this particular woman would sit on different desks and flirt with them. I think that was my first year so I was sort of impressed and didn't learn much of anything. I am sure the boys liked all that attention.

I: Walking to and from home to school, were you concerned with bullies?

MV: There were probably some. I don't remember any particular instances.

I: Who brought the wood in for the stove and did chores like that around the school?

MV: Usually it was the older, the eighth grade boys who did that. I think the woodwas split when it arrived at the school.

I: Was there a sink with indoor water to wash your hands?

MV: There was a pump outside. There was a bucket of water and dipper that everybody drank from. I'm sure it wasn't very sanitary. We didn't have any hot water to clean up with, or wash out our paintbrushes.

I: Tell me about the pens you used; did you have inkwells at that school?

MV: No, I don't think we had inkwells in the lower grades; we had pencils and paper.

I: What the kids do for lunch, bring their own?

MV: Yes, everybody had a lunch box.

Life on the Farm

I: Were there food markets you went to, or did you grow all of your own food?

MV: There were markets but not big chain markets like now. I remember there was a Piggly-Wiggly's grocery store. I never went to a grocery store and my mother made all my clothes but we sure bought shoes. I'm sure there was a shoe store in La Grande.

I: Did women do a lot of canning?

MV: Yes, a lot of canning and we also dried a lot of food, apples and corn but there was a problem of flies on the fruit. People had gardens and canned beans. We raised our own hogs.

I: Did the family gather together when they'd do the butchering, or would everybody do their own?

MV: Everybody kind of did their own butchering. We did have a great big vat that we made the lard soap. Sometimes people would bring their things over to the house to do it because we had this huge vat that we cooked the lard in.

I: There was a big family there on that side, and then your aunts married within the valley and stayed here pretty much. Were there big family get-togethers?

I: What were they raising on the farm?

MV: Mostly wheat, barley; they had milk cows, pigs and sheep. They did have an old Caterpillar tractor that they drove, but they still used horses a lot. They raised hay for the animals.

I: You mentioned bringing some special bulls to the valley.

MV: The ranch was called Blockland Brothers and they had real high- priced Hereford cattle. They had a lot of acreage.

I: Garrett was one, Andrew was the other. What happened to them? **[Who are they?]**

MV: They lost his place. I think they had a little place over in Island City they moved to. He didn't have hardly any equipment. When they had grain to harvest, they leased threshing machines and crews that go around; he didn't own too much. He had an old plow, and some things he did by hand, no expensive equipment.

They didn't have the equipment that they needed to have. It was all pretty much done by hand if they could, and hire crews. They did mow their hay with their old-fashioned mower and a rake.

I: This was all horse- power pretty much?

MV: Yes, a lot of horses. They'd shock and stack it in a big stack; they used to have a derrick.

I: Now what did they do when they got these crews around? Like if they were here for several days did they take care of them, like cook their meals?

MV: Yes, we fed them. I think they had wagons and they camped during harvest season. Whoever hired them fed them as well, at least one big meal at noon.

I: While Grandma was still sick, were they just kind of subsisting at that point on a garden and what was in the smokehouse?

MV: They still had the cattle, milked the cows and had chickens. Back then, people who lived on a farm didn't buy an awful lot of stuff. They always made their own bread, had their own meat, milk, eggs and everything. You didn't go to the store very often.

I: That's completely changed and farming equipment too.

MV: They'd probably still be farming up there if they didn't have all the expensive equipment they had to buy.

I: A lot of the family farms would still be family farms.

MV: Pretty soon there won't be any family farms in this area. Pop would be sitting there and say, "I can see that this valley will be farmed by big corporation", and some of it has. Curt said, "I used to think Pop didn't know what he was talking about."

I: Did your folks have horses then?

MV: Yes, they were horses. Where the Goss' garage is now, there was a livery stable there. In fact, when I went to first and second year of high school, I would walk up to the corner and Grandma would come in a horse and buggy. I'd walk up and get in the little buggy of hers – she had a one-horse buggy – and then we would leave it at the livery stable and then walk up to the high school. I had a horse over at the ranch when I was a kid, but I sure wasn't a horsewoman.

I: Do you remember their first car?

MV: Yes, I remember it was a Ford. It had no glass in it but had side curtains with little izine glass windows that you could see through.

I: Was there a dealership here then?

MV: I think so.

I: I wonder how many doctors there were here at that time?

MV: I don't know. I remember a Dr. Moliter.

I: You mentioned dances, were there other forms of entertainment?

MV: I think there was a theater at the other end of town.

I: How about restaurants?

MV: There were restaurants, but we never went to them, not until I was practically grown.

Piano Lessons

I: How old were you when you started taking piano?

MV: I was ten years old. I began taking lessons from Gladys Miller who was the Presbyterian Church organist.

I: Did you take lessons from her at the church or at her home?

MV: It was at her home. She lived up on the hill somewhere around B or C Avenues. Maybe that old house is still there, I don't know. I only took from her for a year because she left to go back to study in Chicago or someplace. She and Lillian Wells were friends I think, so she called her and told her that I did okay. Gladys was insistent that I keep on with the piano. I began with Lillian when I was eleven.

I: Do you know how many students Lillian Wells had?

MV: She had a lot. There were a lot of people who took lessons from her; people had pianos in their homes and played a lot.

I: When did you start teaching piano?

MV: That was in 1928, I started to teach the year after I graduated.

I: Were you still living at home then?

MV: Yes, I drove Dad's car to my students; they didn't come to me.

I: So how did you drum up business?

MV: I don't know. Some of the students that couldn't afford the other teachers would come to me because I was cheaper, fifty cents a lesson or less. After I got started, of course, finding students became easier. I taught in La Grande and even out to Imbler where I had some students. I would do several students in one day.

I was saving up money because I wanted to go to school, to the University of Oregon. I had saved about $800.00 and it cost $1000. There was no music department here. The school had just started in 1929 and it was mainly for teachers. I didn't want to teach school so I was saving money to go away.

I: That was a lot of fifty-cent lessons for $800.

MV: I had a lot of students.

I: So what happened then?

MV: The banks closed; the money was gone.

I: That must've just devastated you.

MV: You can see why it was called a Great Depression. Everything just stopped. Milo**[?]** was working for the railroad then, they had transferred him to Portland. I think he worked up here for a while till he lost the job.

I: The mill wasn't here?

MV: There was a little old mill here, Palmer Mill. Milo lived in the Pierce house for a while and he sold Fuller brushes. Everybody did everything they could think of to earn a living. I don't think he was very successful with that either because Fuller brushes were always kind of expensive.

I: So what did you do after you lost the money and couldn't go to school?

MV: We got married.

I: Did you ever think you'd marry a farmer?

MV: No, I didn't. I thought I would be lucky to marry anybody. As I said before, we were backwoodsy and I was shy. I met Pop [**?**] in church, he was playing a clarinet in a little orchestra they had in the First Christian Church. He loved music so much and they had invited him to play in their orchestra. Otherwise he wouldn't have joined, because his family were strong Methodists. He didn't like to go to church, but his mother made him. It was at an evening singing program when I met him.

I: How long did you go together before you got married?

MV: Not very long, probably a year or a little more. After we got married, we lived here in a little apartment upstairs. There was absolutely no money to build a house with. We had this little old truck that I drove to teach in.

We were married in February and he died in December. We had a terrible year. We probably shouldn't have got married in the first place. Now, of course, it's so different; people live together and they don't have to get married. I think that's nice, in a way. It was so strict then. Pop was getting older so he was anxious to get married. I was so shy and I thought I'd never get married or have kids or anything.

It was kind of sad. Pop was cute when he was little. He drank a little too much. I was so flattered that he had asked me to marry him. I thought, gosh, I want to get married; we'd better do it. I wasn't very old, just twenty-two. We didn't have any money.

We had a stove and Dad made those cupboards for our dishes. I got a lot of nice things in the bridal shower. Gee, it was nice in that apt. I wasn't very good at cooking but I was learning.

We got married in February and then in March Grandmama got sick. We thought it was just the flu. She really was sick and got worse and worse. They finally got

a doctor and found out she had typhoid fever. Then they quarantined her here at home. They didn't take her to the hospital even though there was a hospital here. We didn't have any money. A nurse would come out and take care of her. It's a wonder she didn't die.

The nurse who took care of her was the loudest snorer. We could hear her throughout the whole house. Mother tried to teach me to cook but I didn't want to learn, but I had to cook for the nurse who ate here and cook for Dad. Of course Grandmama couldn't eat; they were just giving her liquids. She was so sick she required twenty-four hour nursing.

I remember Porter's dad wanted a pie. I'd never made a pie in my life. He laughed at me trying to roll out that piecrust.

It was bad then, and I'm sure that they knew they were losing the place. It was cold, one of those real cold Decembers and he was out taking care of stock or something. We used to have a big stove and he came in and sat down by it. We were living on what I made at the fifty cents a lesson or whatever it was. In December that same year he died.

I didn't know about it until I came home and found him there.

Teaching Music

I: You've taught music for a long time, was there anytime that you did not teach?

MV: I quit when I was pregnant in 1938, but I taught a good ten years from '28 to '38. [**Second marriage? Who is the husband?]**

I quit when you were a baby, but in '38 things were starting to get better. We got a pretty good price for wheat that year, and I didn't have to teach anymore. After ten years, I didn't miss it at all.

I: The baby kept you busy?

MV: I wasn't as crazy about it. I used to laugh at Mrs. Reynolds and how she loved to teach. I thought, how in the world can she do that! But I look back now and I think it's really an addiction. She had a form of Lou Gehrig's disease and she began losing the use of her fingers first; she couldn't fasten a thing. They lived up there in that house and she would have that bed made up, and she taught while she was in bed.

I: Tell me about when you went back to teaching.

MV: This in interesting because Florence Miller called and she was a good friend of Mrs. Reynolds. She had gone to the University of Washington and graduated and

she taught voice and violin. Florence was a good violinist. She called one day and she asked, "I was thinking wouldn't you like to study piano again?"

I: Did you ever give recitals?

MV: Yes, there was a public recital and it was held at the La Grande Hotel. I always remember this because there was a woman there who taught ballet and she traveled around. She was at that recital and she came to me afterward and said, "Have you ever thought of leaving here and studying someplace?" I said, "Well, no."

She said, "I think maybe you have potential". She was from Portland or Seattle or someplace. She gave me her card and said, "If you decide that you want to go away from here, just give me a ring and I think we can get together." I thought, gosh, that's exciting and showed it to Mother. I was sort of ready to pack and leave. Mother said, "of course you're not going to a big city."

Anyway, Florence knew Lyle McMullin from the music department and she said that they're trying to get a music group started up here at the school. They were short of money again like they usually are, but if we could get enough people interested in piano for private lessons, they would hire Lyle McMullin. I said maybe that would be kind of fun. I liked the idea and besides, we were getting more money then, so I could afford it. I had bought that old secondhand piano. She said, "Well, I'll call you. I'll let you know. I think we can do something." She called and said that in the fall, the Normal School was trying to get a piano department. I think they had some choral things going by then, too.

I: So how long did you study up there?

MV: That was in 1948 I think, and I studied for three and a half years. I don't know whether I got tired or something, but I was practicing, Curt was little and I was having problems with him. Lyle suggested I teach. He said, "Why don't you start teaching again?" So I did.

I: Did he help you?

MV: I didn't have very many students at first, and I think maybe he had sent some to me. It had been ten years since I first taught; I started again in 1951 or 1952. Helen Hanson was also teaching at that time.

Depression Times

I: What was it like during the Depression when everybody was scrapping and people would come by and stop?

MV: They called them tramps, but they weren't really tramps. There were people that went around and got food from people. Sometimes people would ask to work, sometimes they just begged. Most of the time they were walking. I think some of them were local, but I think they would travel around. You'd see people walking on the railroad tracks. I think some of them just went from place to place.

I: Were homeless people stealing or anything like that during that time?

MV: They stole all the time. We had this smokehouse back there and they'd come and steal our meat out of the smokehouse. Sometimes they'd even break the locks.

I: What did you have in the smokehouse?

MV: All the cured meat, bacon, hams and shoulders.

I: What did you do with the beef that you would butcher?

MV: We didn't have freezers but we did have cold cellars. I think people would share the meat with their families so they could eat it fresh. People would buy ice for their iceboxes; they didn't have electric refrigerators.

I: It seemed like people would stop in here all the time. Tell me the story about the gas can in the garage.

MV: We always had a full gas can in the garage and one time someone tried to pack it off down the highway.

I: Did they bring it back?

MV: Well, the ones that stole it didn't. We'd have a gas tank ready with a gallon gas can all the time because people would stop. Some of them would fill it up and bring it back, but some of them wouldn't, they'd just take the whole thing.

I guess they thought they could make it over to Island City, but they only made it to here; they would just fall short.

Life on the Farm

I: What kind of food would you have to go out and purchase? Did you grind your own flour, for instance?

MV: Maybe some did but we didn't; we bought our flour.

I: What did do you with those printed flour sacks when the flour was gone?

MV: We'd save them and use them for dishtowels or other things. Some people would sew things out of them; nothing was wasted.

I: What happened at birthdays for the kids or adults? Were there celebrations like we have today?

MV: We had birthday cakes but I don't remember having other kids over for a birthday party. It was a family celebration.

I: When you lived on a farm, did you have a big garden?

MV: We had everything, all kinds of vegetables and potatoes. We grew leaf lettuce for salads, lots of fresh vegetables during the summer. If we had too much, like with lettuce, we would plant it at different times of the spring so that it would be available all during the summer, not just in the early summer. With other vegetables, like corn and beans, we canned them. We did a lot of canning and drying things out in the sun on a big screen or a dryer.

We had dried prunes and cherries that we canned. We grew beets and tomatoes, beans, corn, those kinds of vegetables. When it came to canning, I just watched. The only thing I hated about canning was the heat. They didn't have pressure cookers in those days. They had a huge copper boiler that would hold a dozen or so jars and it was hot, terrifically hot, so nobody wanted to be in the kitchen. It would take three to four hours to can the beans and corn so you wouldn't get botchulism.

We used those zinc lids with rubber rings; you put the rubber around and then screw the top on. We canned peaches, apricots, cherries, and plums and stored them in the cellar.

I: Now did you raise hogs, chickens or calves for meat?

MV: We did.

I: Did you always eat those fresh, or did you save any of the meat by smoking or canning it?

MV: Some people cooked their pork and then put it down in lard, but Mother didn't do that. I don't remember Mother doing much meat preserving aside from mince meat made from beef which was canned. The hams, bacon and those meats that were smoked were kept in the smokehouse. That meat would last us all year, we never had to buy meat.

Beef was a treat because there were no freezers then and we ate it after it was butchered; when it was gone, it was gone, except for the canned mincemeat.

I: So you had real seasons of lots of beef and lots of fresh pork, and the rest of it was smoked?

MV: Yes, and we had chickens all the time.

I: Whose job was it to get the chicken, kill it, and gut it?

MV: A lot of women did that, but Mother couldn't, so Dad had to kill the chickens. Then they were dunked in hot water so the feathers were easier to pluck. They would hang for a bit down in the cellar where it was cool and then get cooked. The chickens also produced eggs and we sold them in these big crates that were taken to the store once a week. We would trade it for groceries that we needed, like flour or sugar.

I: What did you do about milk?

MV: We had cows that gave us milk and we had to separate the milk from the cream that we sold.

I: Now tell me about the process of doing that.

MV: We milked the cows twice a day, in the morning and the evening. We kept the milk in the cellar where it was cool; the milk and cream were separated with the cream going into cream cans. Somebody would come around and collect it and take it to the creamery to be made into butter.

I: Who took care of the separator?

MV: Mother was the one who had to bring the separator up from the barn, wash it and have it all ready to go for the next milking. This was done for a number of years. We did not pasteurize the milk here; we drank it raw.

I: What kind of kitchen utensils and cookware did you have in your kitchen?

MV: Everything's different nowadays. We had dishes of course, flour sacks for dish towels, cloth napkins, especially when company came. We had an oilcloth on the table and real tablecloths when it was a special dinner.

I: Where did you get the oilcloth?

MV: In big rolls at the store. They had lots of different patterns and every table used to have an oilcloth on it. You used it until it wore out, got cracks in it and then we got a new one. They had to be washed off with a dishcloth and some soap and water.

I: What else can you think of in the kitchen that you don't see anymore?

MV: We had at first a woodstove. If there were boys in the family, bringing in the wood was their job. We had a great big wood box next to the stove. Outside, we had a big block of wood that you'd put the wood on and chop it with an axe.

I: That woodstove heated up the kitchen how about the other parts of the house?

MV: Sometimes there was a woodstove in other parts of the house. We used a lot of wood. Our woodshed was just full of wood and we would go through all of that in one winter.

I: Who would go out and get the wood and bring it in?

MV: Sometimes they would haul it down in big trucks from the mountains. Some of the relatives would get together to get the wood.

I: For instance, we use Crisco and olive oil nowadays, what did you use for rendering to fry things with?

MV: Usually lard from the pork. They had huge big vats that they would render the pork in, boil the fat out and make lard. We had several big gallon buckets of lard that we put in the cellar to keep and we would use that for cooking.

I: I was going to ask you what the meals were like on the farm, what did you have for breakfast usually?

MV: We often had cooked cereal, oatmeal and cream of wheat. Sometimes they'd have potatoes, usually bacon and eggs or ham and eggs. They usually had big breakfast because people worked so much harder than the do now.

I: What time did they roll out to go milk the cows, before light?

MV: In the winter, yes. After milking them, they would come in and have a big breakfast.

I: Did your mother make her own bread all the time?

MV: I didn't, but mother did; she always made about three or four pans of bread twice a week. We had bread at every meal.

I: What would you generally cook when there were haying and harvesting crews?

MV: There was beef roast or chickens, vegetables -- it was just a regular meal. There was always some kind of desert, pie or cake. They drank coffee, sometimes water during the meal. Our big meal or dinner was always at noontime. We had

substantial meals three times a day; the men got up early and worked until late at night.

I: What kind of washing machines did your mother have?

MV: At first, she didn't have a washing machine; she would soak the clothes in a big tub and wash them on a washboard. She washed outside and hung the clothes to dry. During the winter, she just hung the clothes around the house, over chairs, next to the stove to dry.

I: What did you eat for supper, was it leftovers from the big meal at noon?

MV: Yes if we had leftovers, and there was lots of soup served.

I: Did you churn your own butter, or did you get it at the creamery?

MV: Mother churned our own butter.

I: Did you drink buttermilk or just plain milk?

MV: I loved buttermilk. We would also have home made cottage cheese sometimes. I don't remember making other kinds of cheese, but we also had ice cream, hand cranked, as a treat in the summer.

I: How did girls take care of their hair? How did they get their curls?

MV: I don't remember when permanents first appeared, but they were wonderful. Before that time, Mother bought these kid curlers. They were made out of soft leather, and they must've had wire in them so you could wrap your hair around these curlers and the leather part.

I: I heard somebody talking about rag curlers, do you remember them?

MV: Mother never did use them; we always had kid curlers. If you didn't have the kid curlers though, you just wrapped your hair around the rags and tied them. Sometimes, you would sleep with them.

I: How often would you use the curlers?

MV: Just when we wanted to on special occasions.

I: How about jewelry or makeup, did your mother have a little jewelry? Did she ever use makeup at all?

MV: Oh yes, she had talcum powder but no rogue or lipstick. That was considered a little cheap. The women didn't use much painting up.

I: Did the women have pierced ears?

MV: I don't know, I think some must have. Mother never had her ears pierced.

I: How about when their hair started to turn gray, would they color their hair?

MV: Nobody I ever knew had colored hair. I think you were supposed to let your hair go natural, not be a painted lady.

I: Would your mother use the kid curlers on her hair or did she use something else?

MV: She had long hair; she never had hers cut. She would braid it and wrap the braids around her head, using hairpins.

I: Do you remember when it was smart to have your hair cut in a bob?

MV: When I was little I don't remember hardly anybody having cut hair.

I: Did boys wear their hair short?

MV: Yes, whoever was handy at it would cut their hair. I'm sure they were barber shops in town, but we didn't use them because we did everything ourselves at home. Of course after we got into high school it was different.

I: What did your family do in the evenings or when there was free time? Did you have magazines, a radio? Did you do reading?

MV: No radio. Everybody read. Usually the women were so tired at night, they went to bed early. If mother had time and energy, she would quilt covers for our beds.

I: What about knitting sweaters, did she do that?

MV: Some people did, but Mother never did.

I: Did she sew?

MV: Yes, on a treadle sewing machine. She would make curtains and that kind of thing.

I: Have you noticed any changes in kids from the early‘30s and ‘40s and now?

MV: I haven’t noticed a great change. Life was just simpler then. It used to be if people were divorced it was kind of an oddity. I’m sure people were unhappy and maybe wished they could get a divorce. Actually human beings haven’t changed that much over the years. It’s just there are so many more advantages now, television for instance.

I: I guess what I’m asking is, do you think that’s a good thing for the family unit in a farming community like this or not?

MV: I think it was a different lifestyle back then. It was hard physically, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing. Gosh, I think kids are smarter now because they have more advantages. It’s bound to be a plus.

Traveling

I: You did some traveling, tell me a little about it**.**

MV: I wish I’d traveled more. Pop used to tell me, go ahead and just do it. He didn’t want to travel, but he said, you can go anyplace you want to.

I: Were there groups that you could travel with in those days?

MV: None. If it hadn’t been for Donna Sands being insistent, I wouldn’t have traveled to the Middle East. We went to Jerusalem, Egypt and then we were in Austria and Germany. It was a two-week trip. I was 75 or so when I began to travel. I thought traveling was interesting, to see different people, places and different things; and I’m just sorry I didn’t do more of that.

I: Now was that your first real trip out of the country?

MV: No, my first trip was to Alaska and Hawaii.

Depression Times

I: During the Depression, when you were married, you were a young woman and had great aspirations of going to school, what were peoples’ attitudes? How did people really act on a day- to-day basis when they were in the throws of those hard times?

MV: Everybody tried to help everybody.

I: How did the banks treat people?

MV: There wasn't anything they could do; they just closed up and there was no money. I think they tried to help everybody. During the Depression everybody tried to help everybody else. If they had anything to share they did it. But a lot of times, there wasn't anything to share.

I: The railroad was here, did they have hobos that would come in and were hungry?

MV: Oh yes. There may have been hobo camps. Sometimes, they would just come to the door, ask for work, if they were able to work, other times, they just were hungry and they had to be fed.

I: Did you ever feed them?

MV: Often. Sometimes if they were able, the men would chop wood. We always had lots of bread and things we could make sandwiches with to feed those who came to our door. They would come to either the front or back door and ask for food.

I: Were you often by yourself when that happened?

MV: Sometimes, yes.

I: Did you ever feel uncomfortable doing that?

MV: No, I don't think so. We lost gas that one time and the smokehouse was broken into and meat taken. I never felt any fear or apprehension about people coming to the door; the doors were never locked. I guess I just the goodness in people.

Recitals at Home

I: All your life you've lived on a ranch and taken care of those things, but you've also had this music career all of your life. You still have adults and youngsters?

MV: Yes.

I: I understand you just had a recital this last week.

MV: Yes.

I: How do you handle those recitals at your house?

MV: We take the furniture out, we get chairs from the basement, and we fix a few refreshments. If I had students here, I would have two in day, one at two o'clock and maybe one at four o'clock. Their parents and grandparents would come; I can fit about forty people in my big room. Then I'd serve homemade cookies and punch afterwards.

I: They must've been really pleased over all that.

MV: They liked the cookies.

I: You've belonged to a teaching organization for several years now, do you get together with them for meetings?

MV: There's the Music Teachers Association and there's the National Music Teachers association.

I: Do you still belong to that?

MV: Yes. I went to the Oregon conventions as well as the two national ones, in Portland and Seattle.

I: That must've been a treat.

MV: It was. Next year it's going to be at Seattle again, but I probably won't be able to go.

I: I'll go with you up there; so you're going to continue to teach?

MV: Just one more year.

I: Retirement is not in your vocabulary?

MV: Well, yes, after next year. We'll see. There have been a lot of good years.